

# LAW STUDENTS IN ACTION PROJECT

Report to the Community  
2005-2006



*Connecting law students and  
underserved communities*

A Project of  
Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc. (LAWNY)  
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 **PRO BONO  
LEGAL CORPS**  
An Equal Justice Works/AmeriCorps Program

# Law Students in Action Project

## 2005-2006

The 2005-2006 program year was an exciting year at the Law Students in Action Project (LSAP). It marked the final year of a three-year grant awarded to Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc. (LAWNY) and the first year that there were two attorneys working on the project. The tremendous growth that occurred during the second year of the project continued during the 2005-2006 program year.

One Equal Justice Works / AmeriCorps attorney was housed in the Geneva office of LAWNY and the second was housed at Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County, Inc. in Rochester. The two attorneys shared administrative duties and the recruiting of volunteer law students. The focus shifted from creating the infrastructure of the program to the expansion of volunteer opportunities and the creation of new programs for volunteers. The result was an increase in the number of volunteers placed at rural public interest offices and the development of a formal Summer Associate Program. In addition, the Equal Justice Works / AmeriCorps attorneys were given the opportunity to work on their own professional development through the inclusion of a legal practice component. The Geneva based attorney focused on family law issues while the Rochester based attorney focused on housing law.

The accomplishments that occurred during the three-year pilot phase of the Project led to a successful refunding application for a new three-year period. The new grant cycle includes an expansion of the project to include a third attorney, who will be housed in the Ithaca office of LAWNY.



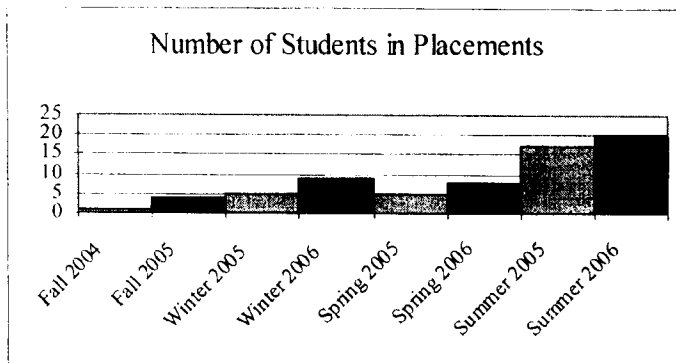
"I gained a lot from this experience. I was exposed to hands-on, nitty-gritty aspects of legal practice that we don't learn in the classroom." - Meredith Gregory, 3L, Syracuse University College of Law, Geneva office of LAWNY, Fall & Spring Semesters

# LSAP Statistics

2005-2006 saw the continued growth of LSAP. In total, 45 volunteers performed 7,150 hours of pro bono legal work that benefited 2,069 clients between September 2005 and September 2006.

	Fall '05	Winter '06	Spring '06	Summer '06
Students	10	13	30	21
Hours volunteered	111	463.9	531.15	6,077
Clients assisted	52	116	250	1,624

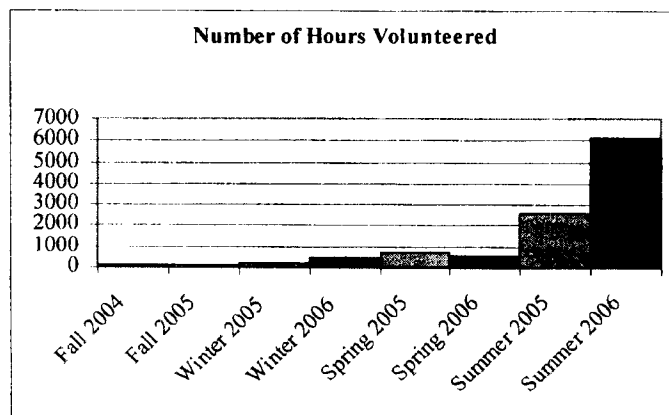
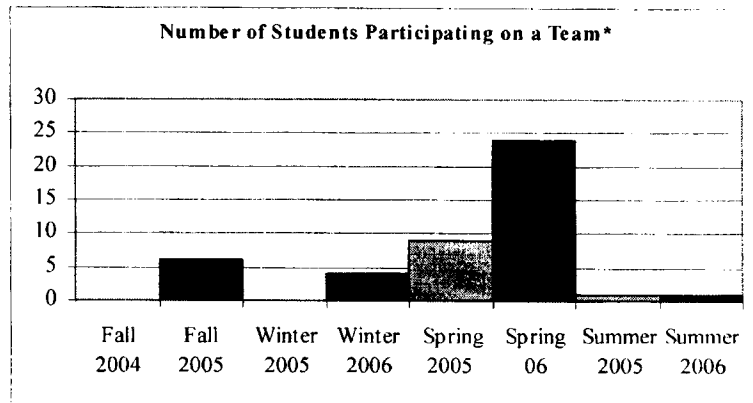
The following graphs illustrate the growth of LSAP between 2004-2005 and 2005-2006.



In each time period, LSAP has been able to increase the number of students participating in internships at the various placements.

The creation of the Volunteer Research Assistance Team (VRAT), Spanish Translation and Interpretation Assistance Team (STIAT) & Pro Bono Assistance Project (PBAP) dramatically increased student participation for 2005-2006

\* Students may have participated during multiple time periods



The Summer Associate Program had a tremendous impact on increasing the number of hours volunteered in 2005-2006. The number of hours volunteered during the summer of 2006 was more than double what was able to be accomplished in 2005.

- 84% strongly agreed/agreed that they learned valuable legal skills during their placement.
- 84% strongly agreed/agreed that volunteering helped improve their law school classroom experience.
- 84% strongly agreed/agreed that they had a positive volunteer experience.
- 87% strongly agreed/agreed that they planned to do pro bono legal work again.

“Challenging work that helped me gain exposure to an area of law that I had not previously experienced.” – Dan Kuhn 2L, University at Buffalo Law School intern at the Empire Justice Center, Spring Semester 2006.

- 59% strongly agreed/agreed that they planned to pursue a career in public interest law.

#### SUPERVISOR EVALUATION RESULTS

Supervisors were asked to complete final evaluations of their experience with LSAP students. Highlights of their results are below:

- 80% said that LSAP met their expectations in finding a student to assist them.
- 85% strongly agreed/agreed that using students allowed them to serve clients more efficiently.
- 85% strongly agreed/agreed that using students allowed their organization to increase client access to legal services.
- 85% strongly agreed/agreed that using students allowed them to better promote the mission of their organization.
- 85% of these supervisors strongly agreed that they will use LSAP students again in the future.

The survey data demonstrates that both the students and the public interest offices were very satisfied with their experience with LSAP.

“I can’t think of anything to improve. This was a terrific program that helped our law office a lot!” – Margaret Perkins, Supervising Attorney, Rochester office of LAWNy

“Keep up the good work.” – Jonathan Feldman, Staff Attorney, Empire Justice Center

“Working for a legal aid organization really made what I learned in the classroom concrete and helped to solidify my commitment to making the legal process accessible to all people regardless of income.” – Alexander Karsten, 2L at University at Buffalo Law School who worked in the Geneva office of LAWNY, winter break

#### SPRING:

During the spring semester eight students were placed in internships by LSAP. Several of the students continued their work from winter break into the spring semester. These included students working at the Rochester office of LAWNY, at Empire Justice Center working on predatory lending issues and at the Legal Aid Society’s Immigration Unit.

One student worked remotely with the domestic violence attorney at the Empire Justice Center on a database for use by domestic violence service providers that detailed relevant case law and recent changes to case law which they could then use to better assist their clients.

The law student working in the Geneva office of LAWNY during the fall semester returned to assist one of the attorneys in completing several pending divorces. The student prepared updated summary memos for each case and then prepared judgment rolls, referee reports and judgments of divorce for court submission.

Another student worked in the Geneva office of LAWNY assisting the Executive Director of LAWNY with several projects including compiling surveys for the LAWNY priority setting process, as well as assisting with several Social Security cases.

“Steve did wonderful work and, as we speak, in the midst of his finals, is still working on our priority setting.” – Ken Perri, Executive Director of LAWNY commenting on his spring semester law student.

One student worked during her spring break in the Bath office of LAWNY where she reviewed Social Security files for possible referral or re-opening related to the removal of an Administrative Law Judge for alleged bias. In this process the student was able to review a variety of files exposing her to a broad picture of the often long life of a Social Security case. The student found the opportunity to be very rewarding.

#### SUMMER ASSOCIATE PROGRAM:

Twenty students participated in LSAP’s Summer Associate Program.

Two of the offices of the Southern Tier Legal Services division of LAWNY hosted law students this past summer. One student worked in the Bath office of LAWNY on Social Security and housing cases. The other student worked in the Olean office of LAWNY where she was able to spend considerable time observing Family Court procedures.

The student in the Rochester office of LAWNY worked under a Practice Order allowing him to represent clients in court under the supervision of one of the office’s housing attorneys. This student won a hearing for one client and also negotiated several settlements for additional clients.

Four law students worked at the Empire Justice Center. One student assisted the predatory lending attorney on a variety of projects. The student reported that before his placement he “couldn’t tell you exactly what a lawyer did on a daily basis” but that his experience gave him a “good idea of what a public interest lawyer does.” The student also enjoyed working with clients and having the opportunity to observe his supervising attorney deal with banks on cases in which he was involved. Another student worked with the domestic violence attorney on case law and legislative updates as well as researching and writing memos. A third law student worked with one of the Social Security law attorneys where she created a brochure describing the Social Security application process for clients. The student was also able to observe several Social Security hearings. The fourth student working at the Empire Justice Center assisted two attorneys in the office in several cases as well as in researching and drafting several memos on topics which included Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act as well as issues of liability and damages.

“At the Empire Justice Center I assisted on a variety of problems to help victims of predatory lending practices. I worked with the supervising attorney on all steps of the case, watching the initial intake develop into negotiated remedies. I also worked on the discovery phase of a fraud claim.” – Jonathan Noble, 2L, Columbia Law School, Empire Justice Center, Summer Associate Program

One student assisted the staff of Farmworker Legal Services where she was able to expand her Spanish language abilities while working with clients on issues such as fair labor standards and housing.

Two students spent the summer working at the Monroe County Office of the Conflict Defender. One student had the opportunity to observe a variety of cases in Rochester City Court as well as perform research for upcoming cases. The other student worked on Family Court cases and was able to also spend quite a bit of time observing Family Court, as well as being included in meetings in Chambers. The student was especially excited about research she did concerning grandparent custody. She was also able to assist in a case in which a suspended judgment was negotiated for a client.

“All the attorneys treated me with respect and gave me many challenging assignments. The working environment was always upbeat and friendly. I learned a great deal about Family Court and gained valuable experiences- I can’t say enough good things about this office.” – Leili Moghari, 2L, Syracuse University College of Law, Monroe County Conflict Defender Office, Summer Associate Program

In addition to those students placed locally, LSAP placed two students as part of its Summer Associate Program through the New York State Diversity Coalition. The New York State Diversity Coalition is a loose association of New York legal services staff and managers dedicated to raising awareness of and resolving diversity issues in civil legal services programs. The two students were placed in the offices of Legal Services for New York City in Manhattan and worked on a variety of diversity projects.

### NEW EDUCATIONAL & SELF-HELP MATERIALS CREATED:

As discussed above, several new educational materials in Spanish were created through STIAT. These materials cover a wide range of legal issues affecting clients including housing, family law, and public benefits. In addition, students worked on several technology initiatives designed to assist pro se litigants throughout New York State.

Additionally, one student created legislative and case law updates relating to domestic violence issues for use by public interest attorneys and domestic violence service providers throughout New York State.

**“Working in this placement not only gave me the opportunity to help the community, I will also take back to school a huge amount of in-depth, real-world experience that is simply impossible to get in a classroom, yet can be invaluable to a career in law.” – Dan Kuhn, 2L, University at Buffalo Law School, Rochester office of LAWNY, Summer Associate Program**

tinue meeting to discuss ways to foster public interest law in Central New York.

In anticipation of the Summer Associate Program and in an attempt to increase awareness of its programs, LSAP also participated in several national and east coast career fairs including the Equal Justice Works Career Fair, NYU Public Interest Career Fair and Washington DC / Baltimore Area Career Fair. These career fairs were a great success and resulted in several placements of talented students.

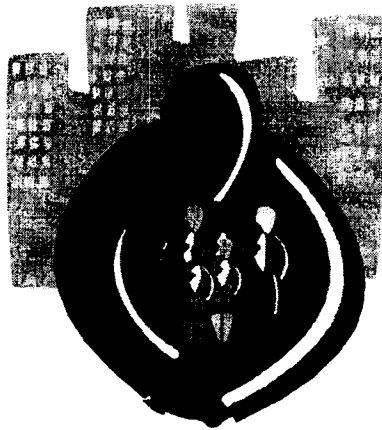
LSAP also guest taught and gave presentations during class about pro bono, public interest law and LSAP in four classes at Syracuse University College of Law. This was an incredible opportunity for LSAP to encourage pro bono and public interest in the law school while also increasing awareness of its programs and highlighting the accomplishments of students. LSAP also guest taught a class at the University at Buffalo Law School which included a round table discussion among students, LSAP and the professor.

### LEARNING ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

LSAP again met with each of the local law schools throughout the year to discuss additional ways to partner and recruit interested students, as well as encourage public interest and pro bono interest at each school. These discussions helped to increase LSAP's understanding of each law school and their students.

LSAP met several times with the new Director of Student Resources at Syracuse University College of Law to discuss ways in which LSAP and the law school could partner to increase student participation in pro bono and public interest.

LSAP also met with each of the offices that had accepted students in the past to discuss ways in which additional students could be utilized as well as to promote the various remote teams available to each office. LSAP strategized with several of the offices on expanding the use of law students in more remote offices, developing new placements and building on existing relationships.





## Goals for 2006-2007

With the addition of a third Equal Justice Works / AmeriCorps attorney, LSAP has set rather ambitious goals for the coming year. We are confident that LSAP will continue to grow and expand. LSAP's goals for 2006-2007 include:

1. Expansion of opportunities for student/attorney involvement in the LAWNY rural areas,
2. Development of opportunities for law students in Ithaca, building on the relationship which the Ithaca office of LAWNY already has with Cornell Law School,
3. Establish a pro se divorce clinic in Ithaca,
4. Establish a project to obtain certificates of relief from civil disabilities for individuals with criminal records,
5. Continued expansion of remote team based projects like VRAT, STIAT & PBAP,
6. Coordinating the launch of PBAP in the LAWNY rural areas with a renewed effort at private attorney involvement in the areas served by LAWNY's Geneva and Ithaca offices,
7. Creation of more remote projects for students,
8. Expanded recruiting of public interest minded students nationally,
9. Completion of the translation of LAWNY's website materials into Spanish through STIAT,
10. Expansion of Summer Associate Program placements for all LAWNY offices,
11. Expansion of LSAP projects & Summer Associate Program to include placements & projects in Central New York, and
12. Increased publicity for LSAP, its projects, students and participating offices.

